

Sergeants focus on basics; show the way in 2nd Inf. Div.

By CSM Barry C. Wheeler

Everywhere you look in Army newspapers, the Internet, and other venues, you see NCOs voicing their concerns and opinions.

While definitely a healthy venue and most often well placed in their concerns, many others are about subjects neither in the NCO Corps' arena nor ability to solve. Many are NCOs who would be well served if they would focus back on what they can solve at their level.

Sergeant Major of the Army Tilley has asked us repeatedly as NCOs to *stay in our lane*. Recently in an interview with the NCO Journal, CSM David

Lady, US Army Europe and 7th Army's top NCO, said, "NCOs should not waste energy, emotion, and time on things we have no influence on."

Very good advice from the Army's top enlisted leadership. Deciding what to focus on in daily work is an ethical question facing all NCOs. Often, NCOs get wrapped around the axle with the ills of the Army and what might, should or could be done about it. Instead, they should focus back on the most important thing to an NCO: *Accomplishment of my mission and the welfare of my soldiers*. Here in the 2nd Infantry Division, that's exactly what the NCO Corps strives to do.

Due to the uniqueness of the short 12-month tour in Korea, the NCOs of the Warrior Division do not have time to worry about the things they have no control over. Instead we worry about being ready to *fight tonight!*

We worry about those things that we have positive control over: 1) can my soldiers perform their individual and crew training tasks to standard; 2) is my soldier qualified on his individual weapon and can he hit what he aims at; 3) does my soldier know his Code of Conduct and General Orders; and, 4) can my soldier properly perform a



PMCS? The list goes on.

What is really important to the division and its NCOs is driven home daily when they consider the ramifications of untrained soldiers being placed within harm's way of a well-trained, 1.2 million man North Korean army only a few kilometers away, a North Korean army that moves closer to the Demilitarized Zone and which gets better equipped and bigger every year. These are sobering thoughts that narrow an NCO's focus in very quick fashion.

In order to maintain NCO focus on what's important, the division's

command sergeants major outlined a few areas for NCOs to concentrate on. While not all inclusive, it does provide them *a lane to stay in*.

NCOs are keepers of the standard. If meeting the standard was easy, we would all be the same rank and receive the same pay. That's why the NCO Corps was established. Noncommissioned officers are paid to ensure that every task is performed to standard. Whatever the task, individual or crew, there is a published standard which the soldier must achieve. Our NCO Corps' job is to ensure the standard is achieved. Units that perform tasks to standard automatically find themselves doing less and are a much safer unit to serve in.

Individual and crew training will always be hands-on and performance-oriented. All NCOs of the 2nd Inf. Div. are mandated to ensure that all individual and crew training is trained to the identified standard and performed repetitively. Our goal as NCOs is simple: *Repetitive performance of the task, which will produce in our soldiers an unhesitating response*. We research the task, condition, and standard for all training conducted. Once identified, we show the soldier how to perform the task and then evaluate

his ability to do so. If the standard is not achieved, we ensure our NCOs retrain those who do not demonstrate proficiency. We totally understand that this retraining may well take our free time. Once evaluated, it is entered into the Leader's Book for future reference.

Soldiers will leave in better shape than when they arrived. The division's soldiers and leaders do not get into their privately owned vehicles and drive away every day at 5 or 6 p.m. Because of this captive audience, we as NCOs would be remiss if our soldiers did not leave in better shape than when they arrived. We mandate to our NCOs that each month during normal performance counseling they will set realistic, achievable physical fitness goals for their soldiers. If they scored 255 on their most recent Army Physical Fitness Test, a realistic goal might be 275 on their next one. Each event of the APFT is goal oriented and the soldier knows what the leader expects. Normally soldiers will not let the leader down if the NCO will just tell them what the expectations are.

Every day starts with a formation and an inspection of the soldier. Within the division, our NCOs expect our soldiers to present a soldierly appearance. The NCOs fully understand that in order to achieve this, we must inspect what we expect. The old adage a unit does well what the boss checks is never more true than when an NCO considers the appearance standards of his soldiers. If not inspected, it's not important. Today's soldiers are very smart and they rapidly key in on what their leaders make important. We more senior NCOs make this important to the junior NCO leaders within the Warrior Division by insisting that daily formations and inspections of our soldiers are conducted. Additionally, we publish soldier appearance standards in our *Warrior Standard Handbook* and we fully expect our soldiers to meet those standards. Each soldier receives one of these handbooks upon assignment to the division.

Soldiers should hit what they aim at. Our goal as NCOs is to ensure that our soldiers are trained to the maximum of their capability. We fully understand that you do well what you practice. If you can't hit the target, you probably just need more practice, practice in applying the four fundamentals of firing, practice that requires the NCO's patience and time. Good shooting requires a repetitive performance of the task.

Preliminary Marksmanship Instruction is the key. It sets soldiers up for success so they don't get discouraged quickly. It enables them to more rapidly start hitting what they aim at. We ensure we do not overlook PMI; we insist it be placed on the training schedule. It is a key point our division's senior leaders look for when attending quarterly training briefs.

There is goodness in the marching of soldiers. Our Army is weird. We like to march. Sound strange? If so,



consider this: every task we undertake is more rapidly accomplished when we ensure the timely arrival of our soldiers. When moving from Point A to Point B, soldiers arrive quicker when they are marched than when left to their own volition. Have you ever heard the NCO who asked, *Where is so and so?* We all have. The answer is, *You had the soldier under your control at one point in time, but you told him to meet you at the motor pool.* Had the NCO given the order, *Right, Face; Forward, March;* he would not be asking where his soldiers are.

The guidance to the NCO Corps of the 2nd Inf. Div. is simple: where more than two soldiers are gathered, so is a formation.

There's a closed loop in counseling. Every soldier, from private to general, receives monthly closed-loop counseling. What is closed-loop counseling, you ask? Think about the words *closed loop*. Imagine an unbroken circle. We use that thought process to drive home the importance of all soldiers in the division receiving counseling with his immediate superior. A sergeant who supervises three soldiers must report for counseling with his staff sergeant with his three soldier's counseling statements for that

month. Likewise, the sergeant first class fully expects his staff sergeants, when reporting for counseling, to report with their subordinate NCOs counseling for that month. The process goes up the entire chain of command. The process forms a completed loop that is inspected and expected by every leader in the division.

Our single-soldier quarters will be better when we leave Korea than when we arrived. Korea is a hardship tour. That's why soldiers only get assigned for 12 months. All too often, our leadership approaches the soldier's barracks with that thought being their primary focus. "Well, they only have to put up with the poor living conditions for 12 months. Suck it up and drive on!" The leader who approaches the soldier's home with that philosophy is committing NCO suicide in the 2nd Inf. Div. Within the division we have a rather simple NCO philosophy: the NCOs of the division own the barracks and they will be better than what we inherited. We strongly encourage unit barracks self-help projects and ensure they receive adequate funds.

Each day without fail, our soldiers will receive a visit in their room from their first-line leader. Normally, it will be before the first formation of the day. This visit is accomplished unobtrusively. By that, I mean it is not a Primary Leadership Development Course-style dress, right, dress inspection. The NCOs are just checking on the soldier to ensure several things. They are checking to see if the room is being maintained to a basic level of cleanliness, if everything in the room still works or whether a work order is required for something broken, and to see how the soldier is living. Noncommissioned officers can learn a wealth of information about their soldiers just by sticking their heads in the door. We want our leadership to know at 5:30 a.m. when the soldier's air conditioning went out at 2:30 a.m. We want to know if the soldier is displaying items that might be offensive to his or her roommate. You will only know these things if you visit the soldier in his living area. The bottom line is this: we want our soldiers to have what we would want for our sons and daughters.

Treat every soldier with dignity and respect. Every soldier has a sergeant. Within our division our sergeants spend more time with their soldiers than do average Army units. As such, it's doubly important that the trust our soldiers place in their leaders not be misplaced or abused. We teach our young NCO leaders by way of NCO professional development and consideration of others training about treating every soldier with the dignity that every American deserves. We drive home this importance with one simple acronym: TIPS.

T- **Talk** to your soldiers

I – Keep your soldiers **Informed**

P – Ensure soldier **Predictability**

S – Be **Sensitive** to your soldier's needs.

This acronym helps our NCO leadership remember what it was like to be a soldier — a soldier who is dependant on his sergeant for everything. This is a trust that we must not take lightly. Our soldiers are someone's son or daughter. We owe their parents this care and concern.

We want to know our soldiers as well as or better than our deadline reports. Ask any company commander in the Army what's on his or her deadline report and they can quote it by heart, bumper number by bumper number.

Within the 2nd Inf. Div., we take that same level of importance and attach it to our soldiers. We want to know when our most precious resource, the soldier, is deadlined. Simply put, the soldier is a weapon system that is even more important than the M1 Tank or the M2 Bradley. Without the soldier, the tank doesn't shoot. We drive this home to our NCO leadership each month by way of several events:

- 1) payday Battle Drill;
- 2) ensuring soldiers receive their reassignment orders at least 90 days in advance;
- 3) Standard Installation Division Personnel System rodeos;
- 4) monthly personnel readiness reviews;
- 5) monthly scrubs of specialists who are eligible for promotion; and,
- 6) monthly meetings between CSMs and first sergeants on soldier-associated activities.

Due to the short tour here in Korea, we process approximately three times more personnel actions each month than a normal stateside unit. We have to keep the soldier ready by making sure simple transactions are completed in a timely manner. Not to do so results in our soldiers being out at Rodriguez Range shooting gunnery, but their brain being at Fort Home, USA. We force our unit NCO leadership and the leadership throughout the division to know their soldiers as well as they know their deadline reports. Our soldiers deserve no less.

Are we perfect within the 2nd Infantry Division? No, not even close. However, we as NCOs must continually strive towards that perfection. Show me a great NCO, and I will show you an NCO who focuses down and not up! Show me an NCO who worries about what he can control and not what he cannot, and I'll show you an NCO who worries about basic fundamentals and the combat readiness of his soldiers. Show me great NCOs, and I'll show you NCOs who stay in their lane.

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